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ABSTRACT

Recommendations for implementing school-based management and shared decision making are presented in this educational policy bulletin. Based on a literature review and reported experiences of educational practitioners, four recommendations include: transformation of authority at district and school site levels; development of a systemwide collegial culture; provision of professional development at all levels; and commitment to participative decision making. A conclusion is that implementation of school-based management requires fundamental changes in traditional behavior and the development of new roles and relationships that empower and build commitment among school and district staff, parents, and the community. (LMI)

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INSIGHTS ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND PRACTICE

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Recommendations for Implementing School-Based Management/Shared Decision Making

Previous issues of SEDL's INSIGHTS have discussed the promises and realities of school-based management / shared decision making (# 16) and the barriers to changing traditional behavior when implementing these strategies (#s 18 & 19). This issue of INSIGHTS presents four recommendations based on the research and experience synthesized in these documents.

The assumption underlying school-based management/shared decision making is that greater decision-making authority at the school level will enable the school to respond more efficiently, effectively, and flexibly to the needs of its unique student population by harnessing two forces: the knowledge of school professionals and the expertise of parents and the community. The problems encountered when changing from a traditional organizational structure to one based on school-based management/shared decision making were explored by SEDL through contacts with educational practitioners currently implementing the strategies. This effort identified eight barriers to successful implementation: resistance to changing roles and responsibilities, fear of losing power, inadequate or inappropriate resources, lack of definition and clarity, lack of skills, lack of trust, lack of hierarchical support, and fear of taking risks.

The following recommendations are based on reports in the literature and on the reported experiences of sites responding to SEDL's inquiries about the implementation of school-based management/shared decision making.

Recommendation One: School Sites and Districts Should Effect a Transformation of Authority.

Authority is the freedom to act within the framework provided by policy and law and the opportunity to make decisions within an area of professional expertise; it is the currency with which people influence what goes on in an organization. A transformation of authority requires systemic revision in roles, relationships, distribution of authority, and allocation of resources — i.e., in the organizational structure. Such a transformation involves not only a redistribution of the power to make decisions, but also a change in the process by which decisions are made.

The emergence of broader school-based authority may be understood best as a change in the definition of leadership and as new expectations for all participants in the school community. Formally empowering the school site necessitates change not only at the building level, but also at the various levels higher in the educational hierarchy. The process by which decisions are made shifts from one that is hierarchical to one that is participative.

The following are implications for the transformation of authority at the school and district levels:

Teacher. Education is currently a highly stratified field in which those at the "lowest" level — teachers — are underutilized. Teachers, who are among the mere 19% of U.S. total population with college degrees, are "alone among those with such extensive professional preparation [in their] lack [of] full control over their professional development" (Casanova, 1989, p. 48). Teachers' understanding

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of the content and methodology of their profession is considerable, yet opportunities to exercise professional judgment are limited both inside and outside the classroom.

New roles for teachers may emerge through the development of teaching teams in which teachers participate in planning, performing, controlling, and improving the instructional program. There may be a differentiation of the teaching career in which interns receive limited assignments and support from experienced teachers, while master teachers have assignments that offer opportunities ranging from the full-time teaching of students to a combination of teaching and curriculum development, teacher training and supervision, or research.

Principal. Principals and teachers should develop a collaborative and collegial professional partnership. Such a partnership requires a very different role from the one previously expected of most principals. A respondent to SEDL's inquiry described the principal's "new" role as a change from an autocratic position to a democratic position. The "new" role may take on more supportive and enabling responsibilities in a collaborative context, such as listening actively and creating opportunities for staff to express ideas, providing resources and a supportive environment for collaborative planning, establishing school-wide goals and programs through staff input and participation, and staffing committees with representatives from all sides (Russell, Mazzarella, White, & Maurer, 1985).

Superintendent. Changes in roles and relationships need to occur at all levels. In particular, shared decision making should be modeled and practiced by the superintendent. The problems that result when this is not the custom are highlighted by another SEDL respondent who said, "the district mandated that principals implement shared decision making in buildings, yet [the superintendent and central office staff] do not model it downtown, nor has the district hierarchy and general organization been changed to have shared decision making throughout the district." The experience of those involved in implementing these strategies suggests there is a much greater likelihood for the success of change when the entire system — including the superintendent as the traditional district leader — "practices what is preached."

Central Office. Sites that have been engaged in school-based management/shared decision making for some time tend to describe the central office as a flexible service department that responds to needs emerging from the individual schools. A "supply and demand" cycle may emerge in which central staffing and resource allocation are based on school site "demand" for specific curriculum materials, training, and technical assistance. In many areas, the function of central office staff may change from decision making to support and facilitation of school efforts (Harrison, Killion, & Mitchell, 1989).

School Board. The school board role should become that of "partner" to the superintendent and to representatives of teacher and administrator organizations. Clune and White (1988) reported extensive involvement of teachers' organizations in the development of districts' school-based management/shared decision-making efforts. Several of the most publicized sites (Dade County, Florida; Cincinnati, Ohio; Rochester, New York; Hammond, Indiana) are characterized by strong superintendent/labor leader partnerships. If school-based management/shared decision making is to create opportunities for improving student learning, partnerships must be in evidence at all levels. A partnership between highest-level policy, management, and labor leaders can model the process required for a community to permanently change its schools for the better.

Parents and Community Members. Parents and community members should become

partners both at the district level and with principal, teachers, and staff at the building level. For example, parent participation on school and district councils can harness a valuable, frequently neglected, resource for the schools — parents' personal knowledge of and influence over their children. In becoming members of school or district councils, parent and community participants take on new leadership roles to directly improve the educational program at their schools or to influence school policy at the district level (Malen et al., 1989). Finally, parents and community members also may have to become advocates for change and serve a public relations function in the greater community.

Recommendation Two: A System-Wide Culture Should Be Developed That Supports Norms of Collegiality and Collaboration.

Effective implementation of school-based management/shared decision making means finding new ways to create an open, collaborative mode of work that replaces existing conditions of isolation and powerlessness. The development of collegial norms is important. Such norms represent a form of group problem solving in which ideas are shared and alternative solutions to problems are explored. Schools and districts that have incorporated teacher-leader roles into their organizational structure have encouraged collegiality by developing and nurturing a climate characterized by open communication, sharing, and willingness to learn. Efforts must be made to develop mutual respect and trust; otherwise suspicion, competitiveness, and inflexibility will defeat any attempt to establish collegial relationships (Ruck, 1986).

Recommendation Three: Professional Development Should Be Provided So That Staff at All Levels Can Acquire New Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes.

Professional development should focus on the new behaviors that members of the school community will have to learn in order to carry out their new roles. Professional development should engage participants in experiences that yield direct transfer to the skills required in school-based management/shared decision making. Participants at all levels (e.g., administrators, teachers, parents, etc.) need to receive appropriate training in order to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to accept, as well as participate in, changing traditional roles, relationships, and behavior as described in the preceding sections. Professional development should address personal and interpersonal needs and include experiences in group processes, team building, and conflict resolution. In addition, staff and other participants must be prepared to deal with the substantive and technical aspects of the issues about which decisions must be made.

Recommendation Four: The Entire Educational System Should Demonstrate Commitment to Shared Decision Making.

For school-based management to be successful, long-term, system-wide commitment to the shared decision-making concept should be built and maintained. System-wide commitment includes support for the effort from every level — from school-house to state-house — reflected by a clear definition of mission, goals, and outcomes and a clear understanding of roles, responsibilities, and distribution of authority. Commitment also includes assuring continuity and stability, protecting the effort from external constraints, and providing the necessary resources for successful implementation.

Conclusion

It is evident that the implementation of school-based management/shared decision making requires fundamental changes in traditional behavior and the development of new roles and relationships. School and district staff, parents, and the community

must be empowered to maximize the educational experience for students, and whole-system commitment must be built and maintained to support change that directly responds to the needs of all children.

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This issue of INSIGHTS was written by Patricia C. Duttweiler, Senior Policy Associate, Theme C, Resources for School Improvement. A complete discussion of restructuring, school-based management, and shared decision making can be found in the SEDL document, *Organizing the Educational System for Excellence: Harnessing the Energy of People.*

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